

a political act, a political act against Afghanistan's stability, which we have condemned, which the Afghan people have condemned.

On the issue of prisoners, I spoke earlier, it does not reflect at all on American people. On the contrary, it's an individual act just like that bad Afghan kidnaped an Italian lady. And it's not the work of the Afghan people. In the same way, we treat this case.

President Bush. Thank you, Mr. President. Thank you.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 11:03 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Minister of Agriculture and Food Obaidullah Ramin of Afghanistan. President Karzai referred to Italian aid worker Clementina Cantoni, who was kidnaped in Kabul, Afghanistan, on May 16.

Joint Declaration of the United States-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership May 23, 2005

Since the fall of the Taliban regime in December 2001, the United States and Afghanistan have made great progress in the pursuit of common strategic objectives. Together we have disrupted international terrorist networks and worked to ensure that Afghanistan will never again be a safe haven for terrorists. The United States has supported the Afghan people as they have established a moderate, representative government. During this time, the U.S. Government and the American people have demonstrated a commitment to an Afghanistan that is democratic, free, and able to provide for its own security.

Afghanistan expresses the profound gratitude of the Afghan people to the people of the United States of America. Thanks to the generosity of the American people and U.S. leadership, this extraordinary effort has enabled the Afghan people to regain hope and confidence and to renew their vision for achieving prosperity and peace.

Afghanistan confronts important challenges to its security and its efforts to build a government based on democratic principles, respect for human rights, and a market economy. To address these challenges, Afghanistan proposed that the United States join in a strategic partnership and

establish close cooperation, including regular, high-level exchanges on the political, security, and economic issues contained herein and other issues of mutual interest. The United States and Afghanistan plan to work together to develop appropriate arrangements and agreements to implement their strategic partnership.

This shared effort will be based on a number of key principles, including a dedication to the rule of law, protection of the human rights and civil liberties of all individuals regardless of ethnic affiliations or gender, support for democratic governance, and reliance on the free market as the best means to further Afghanistan's economic progress. The strategic partnership's primary goal will be to strengthen U.S.-Afghan ties to help ensure Afghanistan's long-term security, democracy, and prosperity. It should contribute to peaceful and productive relations between Afghanistan and its neighbors. It is not directed against any third country.

This partnership will serve as the basis for our common efforts to cooperate in the war against international terror and the struggle against violent extremism, to promote stability and prosperity in the region, and to remain steadfast in supporting Afghanistan's campaign to eradicate poppy

cultivation, provide alternate livelihoods assistance, and fight the production and trafficking of drugs. The partnership will be anchored in the constitutions of our two countries, and will be guided by the United States and Afghanistan's respective obligations under the United Nations Charter and other international agreements and conventions.

Decades of civil war, political violence, and interference in Afghanistan's internal affairs make Afghanistan's security, sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity particularly crucial areas for U.S.-Afghan cooperation. To enhance Afghanistan's long-term democracy, prosperity, and security, we intend to work closely together:

For Democracy and Governance

- Support democratic good governance and the development of civil society based on the rule of law and human rights and encourage broad-based political participation in Afghanistan.
- Help build strong, lasting Afghan Government and civic institutions and support political traditions that are efficient and responsive to the needs of the Afghan people.
- Encourage the advancement of freedom and democracy in the wider region.
- Support Afghanistan's initiative to restore the country's historic role as a land bridge connecting Central and South Asia and to shift the pattern of regional relations from rivalry to economic and political cooperation.
- Foster cooperation between Afghanistan and its neighbors and deter meddling in its internal affairs.
- Support people-to-people exchanges and partnerships to strengthen ties between American and Afghan society, thereby fostering common outlooks and collaboration on the challenges and opportunities before us.

For Prosperity

- Facilitate and support Afghanistan's integration into regional and world economies and appropriate international organizations.
- Help develop a legal and institutional framework for a thriving private sector and an environment favorable to international investment in Afghanistan.
- Encourage and facilitate involvement of U.S. businesses in ventures that accelerate the development of Afghan firms and the private sector.
- Continue the reconstruction of Afghanistan and investments in the people of Afghanistan and encourage other nations to do so.

For Security

- Help organize, train, equip, and sustain Afghan security forces as Afghanistan develops the capacity to undertake this responsibility.
- Consult with respect to taking appropriate measures in the event that Afghanistan perceives that its territorial integrity, independence, or security is threatened or at risk.
- Assist the Afghan Government in security sector reform.
- Continue to conduct counter-terrorism operations in cooperation with Afghan forces.
- Support Coalition assistance to the Afghan Government's counter-narcotics programs.
- Continue intelligence sharing.
- Strengthen Afghanistan's ties with NATO.
- Support border security initiatives.

It is understood that in order to achieve the objectives contained herein, U.S. military forces operating in Afghanistan will continue to have access to Bagram Air Base and its facilities, and facilities at other locations as may be mutually determined and that the U.S. and Coalition forces are to

continue to have the freedom of action required to conduct appropriate military operations based on consultations and pre-agreed procedures.

As Afghan Government capabilities increase, Afghanistan will continue to cooperate against terrorism, to promote regional security, and to combat the drug trade; the Afghan Government, over time, will move to assume Afghan security force sustainment costs; and the Afghan Government intends to maintain capabilities for the detention, as appropriate, of persons apprehended in the War on Terror.

As Afghanistan develops its political system, the United States looks to Afghanistan to respect human rights and develop a just and inclusive society. Regular, free, and fair democratic elections, a free press, and the active implementation of Afghanistan's constitution are hallmarks of the necessary commitment to these principles. The United States relies on the Government of Afghanistan to maintain its firm commitment against the production, processing, and trafficking of narcotics and to assume responsibility for countering narcotics as

police, prosecutorial, and prison capacity is developed and enhanced. Finally, the United States relies on Afghanistan's commitment to create a legal framework and an environment favorable to private sector and domestic and international investment that offers economic opportunities to all Afghan people.

The Afghan people have made tremendous sacrifices and shown great courage in the pursuit of freedom. The United States shares their vision of a country that is democratic, at peace, and working to improve the lives of all Afghans and that plays an important and positive role in the affairs of the region and the world. We are confident that the U.S.-Afghan strategic partnership will play a central role in helping Afghanistan achieve these goals.

George W. Bush
President of the
United States

Hamid Karzai
President of the
Islamic Republic of
Afghanistan

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this joint statement.

Remarks at a Swearing-In Ceremony for Stephen L. Johnson as Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency May 23, 2005

The President. Good afternoon. I'm proud to visit the headquarters of the Environmental Protection Agency. I am honored to be here to congratulate Steve Johnson on becoming America's 11th EPA Administrator. Congratulations. It is good to be up here with Debbie, your wonderful family, as well as your dad, Bill.

I'm sorry that Laura couldn't join us, but today she's been touring the Egyptian desert. [Laughter] She tells me that if you take away the pyramids, it just looks like west Texas. [Laughter]

I want to thank Secretary of Transportation Norm Mineta for joining us. I want to thank the former EPA Administrator, the former Governor of New Jersey, Christie Todd Whitman, for coming today.

I thank Congressman Charlie Taylor of North Carolina for joining us today. Congressman, I'm proud you're here. He happens to be the chairman of the Appropriations Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies. Welcome.

My administration is fulfilling our responsibility to be good stewards of the Earth. Today, America's air, land, and

water are cleaner than they were in 2001. We've reduced air pollution by more than 10 percent. We put in place clean diesel rules that will cut emissions from heavy-duty vehicles by more than 90 percent over 10 years. We've restored nearly 1,200 abandoned industrial sites to productive use. We worked to pass the Healthy Forests Restoration Act to protect forests and wildlife and homeowners against catastrophic fires. We've substantially increased funding to improve water quality in the Great Lakes.

Our policies are protecting the environment while also promoting economic growth. And I want to thank each employee of this Agency for helping make this progress possible.

Steve Johnson is the right man to build on this progress. He has 24 years of experience here at the EPA. He is the first career EPA employee to hold the office of Administrator. Steve is also the first professional scientist to lead the agency. With this background, Steve will help us continue to place sound scientific analysis at the heart of all major environmental decisions.

The EPA recently finalized a rule that places the first-ever national cap on mercury emissions from powerplants, which will result in a nearly 70-percent decrease in these emissions. And we issued the Clean Air Interstate Rule to reduce air pollution from powerplants by 70 percent. These rules are a good start, but they are not a substitute for effective legislation. So one of Steve's first tasks—and I look forward to joining you on this task—to further reduce air pollution is to work with Congress to pass the Clear Skies legislation. Clear Skies is a commonsense, pro-environment, pro-jobs initiative. And Congress needs to pass the bill this year.

Steve will also build on EPA's work to improve the quality and security of our drinking water. We're enforcing strict standards to bring cleaner water to communities across our country. The budget I submitted this year to Congress includes a \$44 million pilot program to develop tools to

better monitor urban water systems, so we can detect contamination as quickly as possible. The budget also increases support for EPA homeland security programs by more than 70 percent next year. Under Steve's leadership, we will work to ensure that every American community continues to have a water supply that is clean and is safe.

We must build on our progress in the conservation and protection of our wetlands, soil, and wildlife habitats. On Earth Day last year, I announced a new goal to restore, improve, and protect at least 3 million acres of wetlands by 2009. After 1 year, we've already enhanced over 800,000 acres of wetlands. And that puts us on a pace to meet our goal.

And finally, we will continue our enforcement strategy, which focuses on achieving real environmental improvements that benefit everyone. Since 2001, the EPA has increased compliance inspections by 19 percent and civil investigations by 24 percent. And last year, the Agency provided compliance assistance to over 730,000 individuals and businesses.

Our strategy is working. Last year we obtained commitments to reduce future pollution by an estimated one billion pounds, an increase of 50 percent over the 2001 level. And I want to thank all the EPA employees who work in the field to work on this collaborative effort.

As Steve leads the EPA, he will maintain our commonsense approach of collaborating with leaders and volunteers at the local level to find the best solutions to meet our national goals. We'll continue to vigorously enforce our environmental laws. We'll encourage good stewardship of natural resources, and we will focus on results. We'll continue to protect the health of our citizens and help guarantee the quality of our air, water, and land for generations to come.

I'm looking forward to working with this good man as he leads this important Agency. Steve, congratulations. God bless.